

[C. P. Wiltse]

S - 241 - R. O. DUP

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

NAME OF WORKER E. E. Holm ADDRESS Mariaville, Nebraska

DATE January 17, 1939 SUBJECT

1. Name and address of informant - C. P. Wiltse, Mariaville, Nebraska
2. Date and time of interview - p.m. January 3, 1939, several other shorter interviews.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any accompanying you - Mrs. E. E. Holm
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. - One end of an old store building is used for living quarters. At night a curtain is drawn so as to give some privacy. Mr. and Mrs. Wiltse are both over seventy years of age and the arrangement of articles in the store are somewhat in keeping with what one would expect from people of that age. C15 - 2/27/41 - Nebraska

FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER E. E. Holm ADDRESS Mariaville, Nebr.

DATE January 17, 1939 SUBJECT

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT C. P. Wiltse, Mariaville, Nebr.

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1. Ancestry - Holland Dutch and French. His ancestors immigrated with the first Dutch in America.
2. Place and date of birth - Richardson County, Nebr. August 25, 1860.
3. Family - Wife and three sons. One son in Texas, two in California.
4. Place lived in, with dates - Richardson Co. 1860-1883. Came to Rock County in 1883 and took a homestead. Operated local newspapers in Basset and Newport. Was also postmaster in Newport for a time.
5. Education, with dates - Received his elementary education from his mother and in rural school in Richardson County. Attended Peru Normal. Studied 13 volumes of law by himself and when ready to take bar exam had a nervous breakdown so moved to the farm.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates - Taught school 7 years in Richardson, Johnson, and Rock County. Justice of the Peace 25 years. Postmaster in Newport 9 years. Operated local newspapers for several years.
7. Special skills and interests - Took a great deal of interest in National politics, was a great admirer of McKinley. Spent a great deal of time in self education along almost every line for a great future which did not materialize.
8. Community and religious activities - Was Sunday School Superintendent in Newport for a number of years and for a time of the Community Sunday School after he moved into the country near Mariaville. Was candidate for committeeman at one time but the neighbors, as a prank, elected his wife to the position.
9. Description of informant - Of average height, blond, and a present time almost blind, but manages to cut a little wood for kindling and at times to wait on customers, who come to the store.

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10. Other points gained in interview

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

WATER WITCHING

A forked stick of witch hazel, about 16 inches long is used, as a "water witch", or "divining rod", to ascertain the ideal spot for diggin a well. Some persons have more "power" than others. I have been successful in locating water underground by this method:

Grasp each prong of the fork in your hands and hold the stick straight ahead. Advance to where you think water is until you feel a downward pull on the stick. Follow the direction in which the pull seems greatest. The distance between where you feel the first pull, and where your stick turns downward is the depth at which you will find water, and the point where the stick pulls straight down is the place to dig your well. Sometimes the "waterwitch" will be pulled downward so forcibly that it breaks.

No, I have never had a stick break for me, but I have heard of this. This method of finding water is quite generally practised.

Mrs. Wiltsee:

One day we were out "waterwitching" on our place. We used an iron rod instead of a switch. You balance the rod on your finger, sort of holding it with your thumb. We used a wagon rod. Near the house it stayed in balance, but down the hill near the gate, it tipped, more and more, as we went down. That is where we shall have our well dug, although it would be much handier near the house.

While we were "water-witchin", our neighbor, Earl Anderson, came 2 by. He stopped to see what we were doing. He laughed at out "water-witching", but we just told him to try it

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himself. He did, and was soon convinced that the rod would pull downward in some places and not in others.

You will notice that Peacock's well is not in a very convenient place. Near the road instead of between the house and barnyard. That is because Grandma Peacock set her foot on the exact spot where she wanted the well to be when the well-digger came, and she must have done a good job of "water-witching", because that is to this day the best well in the country.

Mr. Wiltsee:

A willow switch forked at the end is also pretty good for that purpose. "Water-witching", so-called, is quite generally practiced in this locality. They did it in Richardson County when I was a boy, too. Mrs. Wiltsee: The well-digger here does it.

I think some people do it better than others, because of the electricity in their bodies. Now I know a woman who was hired as a "water-witch" because she was so good at it.

SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC AND CHANGES OF THE MOON

Mr. Wiltsee:

I never paid much attention to the almanac and to planting according to the changes of the moon. As my father used to say, "I plant in the ground, and not in the moon". However, I wish I had paid more attention, because after all, the moon undoubtedly had a powerful influence over our lives and over weather conditions. Why shouldn't it? It pulls the tides.

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Its influence varies just as its distance from both earth and sun vary. Sometimes other planets are close enough that together with the moon they could exert a tremendous influence.

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Mrs. Wiltsee:

Bus, Carlos, we have observed the sign. Don't you remember that fine potatoes we used to get from good Friday plantings?

Mrs. Wiltsee proceeded to relate how her brother Otis Paine, who now farms their land, and many other followed the signs of the Zodiac, in various farm activities.

Root and tuber crops are planted in the "dark of the moon", and plants which bear above ground are planted in the "light of the moon".

Calves, pigs and other farm animals should not be castrated while the 'signs' point to the head or heart of infections and fevers are likely to result. Better to do this work while the 'signs' point to the feet.

The same practice holds for weaning and dehorning. If you wean the calves, or even a human baby during the right signs, you will have no trouble.

Some people even set hens according the signs.

Mrs. Wiltse says that few people hereabouts are superstitious, but Otis wouldn't think of looking at the full moon over his left shoulder, but that to look at it over his right shoulder is a very good omen. But she does think that east wind is worse on neuralgia. She remembers when she was young that if any one had a sty, it was believed that it could be cured in the following manner:

Go to a cross-roads and say: Sty, sty, go out of my eye, Jump on the next one that passes by.

then run away without looking back at the cross-roads.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES. (Mr. W)

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When I first came here in the early eighties, the rough ways and crude manners were very repugnant to me. I was brought up to attend Sunday School and to respect education, my father being a man of education. But I took an active part in community activities. I was superintendent of the [Bairsville G. S. (Mo.)?]. The local adventists held themselves aloof from the Methodist people. We held our meetings in the log school house. Sometimes our minister walked twelve miles to attend meetings. Our organist, Mrs. Armstrong, had a large family, and she always played the organ with a baby on lap. We had a fine choir, as there were a number of talented folks and they all had attended singing schools. It cost a dollar apiece to attend a term of singing school. A capable person would conduct it, every evening for perhaps a six-week period in the winter. He would use a tuning fork, place each of us in the alto, base, soprano, or baritone as a testing out seemed to show we belonged. He would use the black board for teaching us to read the notes and time. We really became quite good sight readers and learned the rudiments of music. We used many rounds, and became good at part singing. None of the young people in the community today can do what we could from our old fashioned singing school training. We sang at funerals, and at our [lyceums?].

But I guess I started to tell about Sunday School. Well, I drove a yoke of oxen to get there, and honestly I got so ashamed of the language I had to use at those beasts all the way as I whipped them along, that I just simply resigned. I just couldn't be bull-whacker and Sunday School superintendent at the same time. But we had a fine Sunday School, and I do wish the young people now-adays had some of our community spirit.

LYCEUMS OF LITERARIES

Old gentleman Peacock and I were officers of the first lyceums, he president and I secretary. It was decided at the first meeting that the program should consist of a debate, a few recitations, some musical numbers, and a newspaper. Refreshments were served at the end of each program, and folks visited. But at midnight everybody went home.

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Now our debates were nothing to be laughed at. We had a number of earnest, thinking people here who took [?] an active part. Religion and politics were avoided as topics. A favorite topic was, Resolved that pursuit is better than pleasure. Some more were Resolved that Fire does more damage that water—that the pen is mightier than the sword, Resolved that wood is more useful than iron, etc.

I cannot recall the recitations, but we had some excellent elocutionists in those days.

Music was mostly vocal with the organ accompanying. There was a prejudice against violins, it seemed.

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New editors were appointed for the newspaper for each program. It was here that people exercised their faculty for joking, and I regret that I was often the butt of their jokes. I had an economical streak and bought a pony which turned out to be a vicious brute. They named him Broncho Bill, and managed to find a funny news item about me and Broncho Bill every meeting. I used to wish to God that I never had seen Broncho Bill.

I wish I could remember some of those jokes. Anyhow they afforded much merriment, and “A little Nonsense—”. One girl had a joke about her dad being elected president. Her item said that her father had shouted “President” down the rain barrel to see how it would sound to him. (‘Have you never heard about calling down the rain barrel? They used to accuse new poppas of hollering ‘Papa’ down the rainbarrel to see how it would sound when it echoed back.)

- O, yes we used to have spelling bees also. Young and old took pride in trying to excel along this line, but you wouldn't catch the modern youngsters doing that.

OUTLAWRY AND VIGILANCE COMMITTEES

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I had no trouble with horse thieves, but I always slept with a revolver under my pillow, for like many other settlers I feared them. I came here in ['83?], but the "pony boys had been operating along the [Niobrara?] from [Niobrara?] City to Keyapaha County since the early '70's. They were a wild set and stole largely from the Indians Northward. They 7 were too much for the Indians, because of their good fire arms and their accurate marksmanship. Settlers generally kept on good terms with the pony boys, because they could not afford to do otherwise. When they began to steal settler's horses, vigilance committees were organized. These settlers took the law into their own hands.

One fearless settler, Sam Likens, walked up to some pony boys once, and told them that if ever they bothered him he would certainly prosecute. The next day two of them appeared and took his horses.

The Thienken Brothers had a big outfit in western Boyd County on the Keyapaha, and access to their stable was only through their living quarters. They also boasted, but one day their horses were stolen!

[Carns?] was the center of their activities, and the storekeeper, Morris, was under suspicion both of the settlers and of the outlaws. But I think if I were in his place, I would have kept my mouth shut, too. One man can't fight forty thieves.

The Wades did not confine their depredations to Indians. My father knew a man in York State, whom he believes was the Kid's father. This man had stolen a horse, and was punished outside the law by a group who hanged him to a tree by his thumbs, and drew him up and let him down again three times. Then they released him, and ordered him to leave and never return.

Wade setteled near what is now Wheeler, So. Dak. on the Nebraska side of the river. His home was a dugout in a bluff accessible by boat only. He raised a family, and it is said he trained the Kid in outlawry.

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After the Vigilance Committees were organized lynching became a habit in Keyapaha County. An inner ring of unscrupulous men took advantage of their membership in the "Viges" to murder and rob. The murder of a widow woman who had her money in her house roused the settlers indignation and soon there was an end of such doings.

It is quite generally believed that Kid Wade was lynched not so much for his depredations as for the fact that he had seen too much outlawry, and perhaps some actual Vige Executions, and that he might give evidence which could convict some of them of murder.

Old man Wade was taken out of the custody of Justice-of-the-Peace Gates near Newport one winter night in '83 or '84. Locally well-known Vigies who did not hold themselves above murder and robbery took Wade, robbed him, and buried him in a shallow grave 4 miles northeast of Newport. His partially covered body was found in the spring. It was reported that time that Wade had over a thousand dollars in his belt when he was taken. (Mr. Wiltse did not recall the [source?] or authenticity of this statement).

As for Doc Middleton most of the settlers do not believe that he ever stole horses from settlers, but only from Indians. Doc was a romantic figure with a striking personality. A nice young lady who saw him pass through Newport during the famous race to the World Fair, remarked, "I nearly ran away with him."

He eloped with both of his wives, both Richardson girls, both times forded the river with his girl on horse back. In both cases posses went after him, but no one ever seriously interfered with Doc. The first wife married another while Doc was in the pen, and when he was out he rode up to the same vicinity (Carns), passed the home of number one, 9 and rode on to her father's home where he paid rapid courtship to the other sister.